

'Chinese schools need non-Chinese to survive'

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PETALING JAYA: Under-enrolled Chinese schools, especially in rural areas, need to take in non-Chinese students if they are to remain open, a United Chinese School Teachers Association of Malaysia (Dong Zong) study has found.

Dong Zong chairman Ong Chiow Chuen said schools, especially those with less than 30 students, had to enrol non-Chinese in order to survive.

"The schools might face being closed down if the student population cannot be maintained," he said in an interview.

Dong Zong's report on under-enrolled Chinese schools, released last week, found that more than half the student population in over 30% of under-enrolled schools were non-Chinese.

There are 1,289 Chinese primary schools nationwide, but 524 or 40.65% are under-enrolled with less than 150 pupils. There are also 106 under-enrolled schools in critical condition with less than 30 students.

UNDER-ENROLLED PRIMARY SCHOOLS (< 150 STUDENTS) IN 2007

	National schools (SK)	National-type schools (SJK Chinese)	(SJK Tamil)
Under-enrolled	1,698	524	331
Total no. of schools	5,781	1,289	523
Percentage	29.37%	40.64%	63.29%

NON-CHINESE STUDENTS IN UNDER-ENROLLED CHINESE SCHOOLS (< 30 STUDENTS)

No non-Chinese	26	24.53%
Less than 50% non-Chinese	40	37.73%
50% Chinese, 50% non-Chinese	2	1.89%
Over 50% non-Chinese	35	33.02%
Details incomplete	3	2.83%

According to the report, students of all standards in these schools had to be grouped in the same classroom and taught by only one teacher. "With the large number of non-Chinese students in the class, teachers also faced the problem of teaching them," it said.

Teachers at under-enrolled schools may also need to do administrative work and attend seminars and meetings. Under the Education Ministry's guidelines, schools with

less than 20 students will be assigned only three teachers, and those with less than 45 students, four teachers excluding the school head.

Ong said Chinese schools were popular with non-Chinese because of their track record in science and mathematics, noting that the situation was more common in East Malaysia where Orang Asli children are often sent to Chinese schools.

To a question, Ong said it was not important whether more non-Chinese were registered in Chinese schools.

"More importantly, the government should build more Chinese schools in areas with a dense Chinese population. We have more and more (Chinese) children but fewer Chinese schools for them to study in.

"Although the MCA is helping these schools relocate, it is still up to the board of governors and the parent teacher associations to find land. This is our biggest problem."

On the issue of an insufficient number of schools in urban areas, MCA Youth education bureau chief Dr Wee Ka Siong said it is easier to relocate an under-enrolled school than to ask the government for a new school.

"As far as the MCA is concerned, finding land to relocate these schools has never been a problem. For example, we have successfully relocated a school from Perak to Puchong, and Johor also has plenty of land suitable for relocation," he said.

Wee said it is better to relocate under-enrolled schools to urban centres to benefit the community rather than leave them under-enrolled where they are. The MCA has relocated 32 under-enrolled schools since 1999, he said.

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